Gary H. Palm, ‘67, 1942-2016

A professor in the Mandel Legal Aid Clinic for thirty years, a tireless advocate for clinical legal education, and a formidable litigator, Gary H. Palm, ‘67, Professor Emeritus of Law, passed away on February 14, 2016. He was 73.

“For almost three decades Gary was the face of clinical legal education not only at Chicago but throughout the United States,” said Randall Schmidt, ‘79, Clinical Professor of Law, who was both a colleague and student of Palm’s. “He fought fiercely for both the rights of his clients and clinical teachers. He was a mentor and role model to hundreds of law students and clinical teachers, including me. He will be missed.”

“Gary Palm was a pioneer in clinical education,” said Douglas Baird, Harry A. Bigelow Distinguished Service Professor of Law and former dean of the University of Chicago Law School. “His leadership of the Mandel Legal Aid Clinic brought distinction to the Law School, and his hard work was instrumental in creating the Kane Center.”

In 1970, Palm became Assistant Professor of Law and Director of the Law School’s Edwin F. Mandel Legal Aid Clinic, returning to his alma mater and the clinic he worked in as a student. Under his direction, the attorneys transformed the clinic to focus on impact litigation and community-based advocacy with a deep emphasis on clinical education for law students. He and his fellow clinical faculty members offered one of the first trial practice programs taught through trying actual cases in courts under the Illinois student Practice Rule. The Mandel Clinic grew under his leadership to become a vital advocate and legal representative for the indigent, and remains so today.

In a retrospective on the first fifty years of the Law School’s Clinic, Tom Stillman, ‘68, who worked as a clinic attorney with Palm, said, “Gary came in with a commitment from the Law School to create a more formalized teaching model. When I got back to the Clinic as a teacher, things had changed. Students were interviewing clients on their own, discussing the cases with the attorneys, and then they would both go to court. It was no longer that the case belonged to the lawyer and you were there to help out. It was more like the case belonged to the students and the attorneys were there to help out.”

While continuing to direct the clinic for twenty years, Palm also practiced employment discrimination law for plaintiffs and engaged in welfare-to-work advocacy for clients seeking job training benefits and child support enforcement. At the Law School, he taught Trial Practice, Section 1983 Civil Rights Litigation, and Public Interest Practice. Palm and his students won many important cases in the federal and state courts including Logan v. Zimmerman Brush Co., in which the United States Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, reversed the Illinois Supreme Court on due process grounds with four judges concurring on equal protection grounds.

Palm was also a staunch advocate for clinical faculty and clinical legal education during and after his time at the Law School. He worked with clinical professors around the country on programmatic and curricular advances to improve clinical legal education. He also served as the first clinical teacher on the ABA Accreditation Committee and served for six years on the Council of the ABA’s Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar.

Palm graduated from Wittenberg University and the Law School. During his time as a student at the Law School, Palm volunteered in the Mandel Legal Aid Clinic and was elected to the Order of the Coif. He practiced law for three years at Schiff, Hardin and Waite.

In his later life, Palm continued his work on behalf of those in the city of Chicago most in need of assistance, often tenaciously litigating cases that others would not. Among his accomplishments in recent years is the landmark case of Palm v. 2800 Lake Shore Drive Condominium Assoc., which clarified the state’s authority in “home rule” cases and settled an important but difficult-to-challenge point of condominium law.

Palm’s transformative role at the Law School and in the Mandel Legal Aid Clinic will be long remembered by generations of faculty and students. “Gary Palm transformed clinical education at the Law School and across the country,” said his long-time colleague Mark Heyrman, ‘77, Clinical Professor of Law. “He cared deeply for his clients and his students. During his many decades at the Law School, he inspired generations of students to care about pro bono work and to engage in efforts to reform the law.”

“Everywhere I traveled,” said Saul Levmore, William B. Graham Distinguished Service Professor of Law, “I encountered graduates who looked back on their experiences with Gary as the very best and most valuable part of their Chicago education.”